

Civic Design 7



Figure 7.1: Some of the notable trees in the Plan Area

Public space is always important, but especially when the streetscape design and an increased density and mixture of land uses encourage pedestrian activity, as in the Southwest Downtown Plan Area (Plan Area). Many of the design guideline objectives from the Carter Design Associates Report summarized in Chapter 3 (Land Use & Zoning) pertain to elements of civic design which contribute to the Plan Area's character. As discussed in this chapter, these can be physically incorporated into the Plan Area through additions to the public space, such as street trees, landscaping, street furniture and lighting. This chapter also addresses the addition of public plazas and trails, as well as the preservation of large trees.

7.1 Tree Preservation

Large tree preservation was the most significant specific appearance issue noted in response to the Southwest Downtown Survey (see Appendix B). Forty-six percent (46%) of Survey respondents found that large tree preservation was a concern that needed to be addressed. According to the Survey, preserving large trees was especially important to area residents and to those that have been in the Plan Area for more than ten years.

A number of significantly sized trees are located in the Plan Area, many of which predate settlement. The City of Round Rock has an existing Tree Protection and Preservation Ordinance in place that protects trees of a certain size and species that are in good health. If a

protected tree is removed, the loss must be mitigated by replacing it at a rate stated in the Tree Protection and Preservation Ordinance or by paying into a City tree fund. The amount paid into the fund is determined by the size of the tree that is removed. Since parcels of land are small and additional development in the Plan Area is anticipated, locating replacement trees on the same lot may not be possible. Replanting may be better suited in the City's right-of-way along the street as part of the public streetscape. The proposed streetscape design from the Street Improvement Plan presented in Chapter 4 (Streets & Circulation) incorporates extensive street tree plantings into its design. Large trees that already exist in the right-of-way will be preserved and incorporated into the streetscape design. The Tree Protection and Preservation Ordinance applies to all areas of the City. One change recommended for the Southwest Downtown Plan Area is that funds collected from the Southwest Downtown Plan Area should be allocated for the purpose of planting, maintaining and replacing the trees within the Plan Area.

Some of the trees in the Plan Area contribute significantly to the character of the area and therefore warrant possible additional preservation efforts. For the purposes of the Southwest Downtown Plan only, these trees are called "heritage trees". A "heritage tree" is large in size, healthy, and a noted specimen because of its age and presence in the Plan Area. In Figure 7.2, potential "heritage trees" are indicated because they appear to be of a significant size and a protected species, as identified through aerial photography and by inspection from the street. These trees should be further inspected at some point in the future. Many are on private property, and further inspection would allow them to be measured and their health determined.

Regardless of their designation as a "heritage tree" in the Plan, compliance with the City's Tree Protection and Preservation Ordinance is required if a tree meets the criteria for protection under the existing Ordinance. However, the designation of "heritage trees" in this Plan highlights a tree's importance to the neighborhood, and its preservation would be beneficial in maintaining the character of the Plan Area. This Plan recommends

additional review at a later date to develop the criteria by which additional protections for “heritage trees” will be incorporated into an ordinance.

Figure 7.2: These trees are potential candidates for “heritage tree” status according to the Southwest Downtown Plan. Further study is necessary to conclusively determine which trees qualify for this status and what additional protections will be recommended beyond those provided by the Tree Protection and Preservation Ordinance.

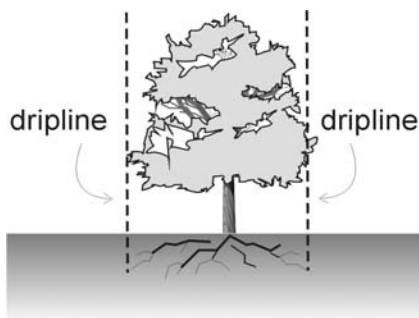
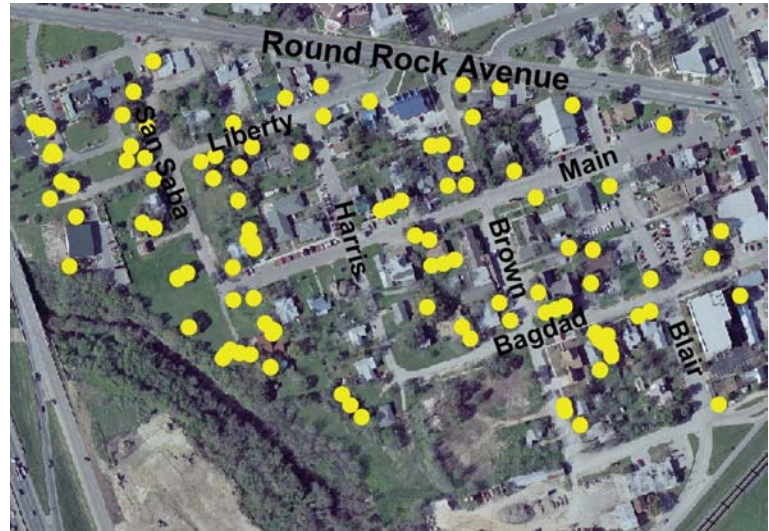


Figure 7.3: The ground surface within a tree’s dripline should not be covered up if the tree is expected to survive.

Accommodating “heritage trees” presents both challenges and opportunities. In general, the tree’s root system extends out as far as its canopy, which is also known as the “dripline”. A tree is likely to die if its roots are built or paved over. However, trees can be incorporated into courtyards and landscaping by using the area over the root system for seating. The area under the canopy should remain unpaved except by material that is sufficiently air- and water-permeable.

7.2 Public Parkland and Plazas

The City has identified several areas that will become defined public open spaces in the Plan Area.

Lake Creek Corridor

The City of Round Rock adopted the “The Citywide Trails Master Plan” in April 2004. The purpose of The Trails Master Plan is to identify key trail corridors to establish a framework for a future citywide network of trails, green-belts, and recreation amenities linking major parks and features of Round Rock. One of the corridors identified, the Lake Creek Corridor, forms the southwestern boundary of the Plan Area. The entire Lake Creek

Corridor is approximately 3.25 miles long. The Corridor connects with the Round Rock West Greenbelt and terminates at the McNeil Road Corridor west of IH-35. The Corridor will connect the existing Lake Creek and Rabb Parks located at the confluence of Lake Creek and Brushy Creek east of IH-35. Round Rock's Municipal Office Complex (MOC) offers an ideal site for a major trailhead facility along the Lake Creek Corridor.

Round Rock Municipal Office Complex – Civic Plaza

The central feature of the MOC will be a civic plaza, framed by the McConico Building, the Senior Activity Center, and the City Hall. The Civic Plaza will serve as a community landmark to be utilized as a venue for public gatherings including artistic performances and lectures.

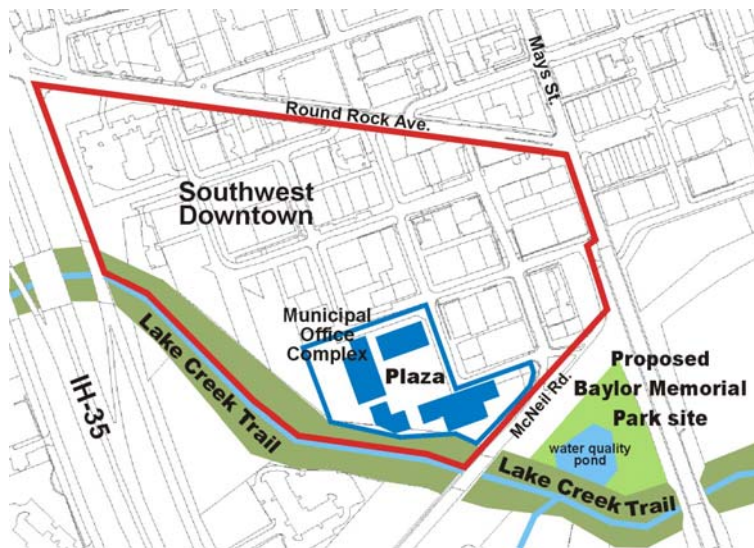


Figure 7.4: Major parks and public spaces in the Plan Area

Baylor “Immortal Ten” Memorial Park

The City's Historic Preservation Commission has proposed the development of a memorial park to remember ten Baylor University students who lost their lives on January 22, 1927. “The Immortal Ten”, as they became known, died when a passenger train hit the basketball team's bus at the Round Rock railroad crossing on Mays Street (US 81). In 1935, an overpass was completed over the railroad crossing that was the crash



Figure 7.5: 1927 Baylor University Basketball team photo; newspaper photo of wreckage at the Mays Street railroad crossing



Addison Circle, Addison, Texas

Figure 7.6: Streets and sidewalks are some of the most significant, but often overlooked, public spaces.

site. Baylor University still remembers these “Immortal Ten” each year during homecoming and has expressed interest in helping raise funds to develop a memorial in Round Rock. The planned Baylor “Immortal Ten” Memorial Park would honor the team and be located in close proximity to the site of the accident. This park is in its conceptual stages. The proposed site along the railroad track at McNeil Road is on land currently owned by the City of Round Rock in the area where a water quality pond will be located. The proposed park could serve as a potential connection to Lake Creek Trail.

7.3 The Streetscape as Public Space

The street is the most significant public space in the Plan Area. An essential part of creating a vibrant mixed-use district is to have a safe and attractive pedestrian environment. Creating efficient access to street parking, parking lots and public facilities requires that people be able to walk safely to their destinations or between multiple destinations.

The Southwest Downtown Plan Area’s street improvements will contribute to the creation of a pedestrian-friendly street environment in the following ways:

Separation from traffic – Pedestrian safety and comfort are enhanced by separation from traffic with on-street parking, street trees and street furniture.

Sidewalks – Sidewalks proposed for the Plan Area are at least 7 ½ feet wide. Street furniture and outdoor displays provide amenities for pedestrians. However, sidewalks should have a pedestrian zone that is free from obstruction.

Lighting – Lighting is an important element in a mixed-use district where there are a variety of activities, some of which occur in the evening. Streets and pedestrian areas should be lit so residents and visitors to the area feel safe walking in the evening hours. The style of street lamp selected for the Municipal Office Complex will also be used throughout the Plan Area. The lampposts also include brackets for banners which can be used to advertise local events.

Street Furniture – Lampposts, benches, trash receptacles, bicycle racks, planters, and even newspaper racks, are all elements of street furniture. These examples add scale and character and also invite people to stop and enjoy the streetscape and public space. The furniture selected should complement historic buildings in the Plan Area and be compatible with newer construction. In addition, benches, bike racks, and trash receptacles will be installed at the Municipal Office Complex. A system of wayfinding signs, including street signs, directional signs and other district information signs, should be developed for the Plan Area.

Landscaping – Landscaping helps distinguish between public and private spaces. Plant materials can be used to define outdoor eating areas and pedestrian paths between parking and building entries. Adequate sight distance must be provided for motorists and pedestrians entering and exiting a site. Landscaping should not interfere with the efficiency of traffic and pedestrian movement. Where appropriate, street tree planting could replace street yard landscaping requirements for commercial uses; however, the need for a unified streetscape appearance will require that certain street trees be planted at the same time. The location of street trees is determined by Consultants PageSoutherlandPage’s Street Improvement Plan.

Building Design Standards – Building design standards for the proposed Mixed-Use Zoning District will encourage design that will help enhance the streetscape. Principles behind these standards are discussed in detail in Chapter 8 (Design Recommendations). A few examples are listed below.

- Reduce side and front setbacks.
- Increase building transparency at the street level.
- Provide shade structures.
- Prohibit parking in the street yard.
- Orient the main entrances of buildings to east-west streets, reinforcing the development pattern of the City’s original downtown plat.
- Limit driveways and other interruptions of the sidewalk.



Figure 7.7: Examples of “street furniture” near the McConico Building that will be used for the Municipal Office Complex. Lampposts, like those pictured above, will provide street lighting for the Plan Area.

- Add building offsets and details to enhance visual interest at the pedestrian level.
- Design building signage to be in harmony with the style and character of a development.

7.4 Civic Design Recommendations

- Meet the five design guideline objectives outlined by Carter Design Associates:
 1. Maintain a sense of connection with the historic street grid and single-family house traditions, while accommodating new construction.
 2. Enhance connectivity between destinations.
 3. Minimize the impacts of increased automobile traffic.
 4. Enhance pedestrian activity.
 5. Continue the tradition of landscaped right-of-way and specimen tree planting at the street edge and in front yards.
- Identify and preserve healthy “heritage trees”.
- Ensure that large trees in the street’s right-of-way are accommodated and incorporated into the streetscape design.
- Earmark Tree Protection and Preservation Ordinance funds collected in the Plan Area for the purpose of planting, maintaining and replacing trees within the Southwest Downtown Plan Area.
- Establish a hike and bike trail along Lake Creek, as identified in the City’s Trails Master Plan.
- Construct a civic plaza at the center of the Municipal Office Complex, as identified in plans for the Complex.
- Acquire funding to create Baylor Memorial Park south of the railroad tracks and then establish connections between the park, Lake Creek Trail and the Plan Area so that there is easy and safe access to the Park.

- Coordinate with the City of Round Rock Parks and Recreation Department on public improvements that may affect the location of proposed hike and bike trails.
- Create a safe and attractive pedestrian environment in the Plan Area.
- Use landscaping or other structural elements to define open space and gathering spaces, and to distinguish private property from the public streetscape.
- Adopt revisions to the Landscaping Development Standards in the Zoning Ordinance which allow planting of street trees to replace street yard landscaping requirements for commercial uses.
- Ensure that future street tree plantings contribute to a uniform streetscape appearance and are planted according to Street Improvement Plan.
- Provide street lighting and recommend pedestrian-scaled lighting throughout the Plan Area.
- Provide wayfinding signs, including street signs, directional signs, vehicular directions, pedestrian directions, business wayfinding, and district information signs throughout the Plan Area.
- Apply the Signs for Historic Districts and Historic Landmarks Ordinance to the Southwest Downtown Plan Area.
- Encourage that the future replatting of lots reinforces the original downtown platting of narrow lots facing the East-West avenues, with building fronts coming up to the street and the rear of the building abutting the alley, middle of the block, or internal parking areas.